

Soldiers

Online

MSG Lewis Matson



Soldiers of the 588th Engineer Battalion from Fort Hood, Texas, were among the troops called in to help battle widespread fires.

Washington

Soldiers Help Fight Wildfires

ALMOST 4,000 soldiers — 2,100 active-duty and 1,700 National Guard members from 11 western states — were called up to join civilian firefighters from around the world in battling blazes that erupted throughout the west. Air National Guard and Marine units also were deployed to help in one of the worst fire seasons ever.

Army Guard soldiers not only fought the flames, they also supported law-enforcement personnel guarding evacuated homes and routed traffic around fire sites, and in some states Guard members provided portable water and transportation to the firefighters. National Guard aircraft fought the fires by dropping water on them, and by transporting firefighters and equipment.

The first active-duty soldiers to fight the wildfires were sent from Fort Hood, Texas. Soldiers from the 4th Infantry Division arrived on the fire line in early August to help fight the Burgdorf

Junction blaze in the Payette National Forest near McCall, Idaho. These soldiers were primarily from the 3rd Battalion, 16th Field Artillery Regiment.

Another battalion of Fort Hood soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division's 20th Engineer Battalion arrived in Montana in mid August to help fight the Ninemile Complex fires, located 25 miles northwest of Missoula.

About 560 infantrymen from the 3rd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Div., at Fort Campbell, Ky., deployed to Montana.

Another 500 troops from the 18th Airborne Corps — primarily from the 1st Battalion, 321st Field Artillery, at Fort Bragg, N.C. — deployed by late August to battle wildfires in the Kootenai National Forest in Montana.

One of the jobs the active-duty soldiers performed was mopping up in burned-out areas.

"Walking around, you'll see just a little bit of smoke coming from the ground and you want to leave it alone," said PVT Zeke Sanchez of the 1st Cav. Div.'s Team Dragon. "But when you

start digging you'll find all the red-hot embers. And those embers can start the fire going again. I can't believe how fast this forest catches fire."

Soldiers face many dangers on the fire line. Burned trees that are still standing but have the potential to fall — called snags — slam into the forest floor regularly.

PFC Chris Crain and fellow soldiers of Team Dragon call these falling trees "widow makers" because they fall without warning and when they do they fall hard.

Although fighting fires is for-

eign to most of the soldiers, they have been able to shift gears effectively, said Don Black, the deputy assistant commander of the Northern Rockies Incident Management team.

When the civilian fire-fighters reach their limit, crews start to rotate from one fire to another. Without the soldiers, Black said it would have been difficult to imagine what the tapped-out fire-fighting crews would have been able to do.

Back at the fire base camps the Army and Air Force Exchange Service set up mobile

Health Update

Some Soldiers Cleared for Eye Surgery

WITH only a few exceptions, active-duty soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines are allowed to have their vision corrected with laser eye surgery and not worry about it affecting their careers.

Service officials have been studying photorefractive keratectomy, or PRK, and laser in-situ keratomileusis, commonly called LASIK, the two most common procedures, almost since their outset and are convinced they're safe for military members in most career fields.

PRK involves correcting vision by using a laser to remove surface corneal tissue. In LASIK, the surgeon cuts a flap in the cornea, flips it aside, removes corneal tissue with a laser, and flips the corneal flap back into place.

Army aviators will fail their flight physicals if they have PRK and LASIK.

Service members do need to be evaluated by a medical board after receiving the now-rare radial keratotomy, RK, the first common vision-correction surgical procedure.

The Army is different from the other services in that it's providing PRK free to certain soldiers, said Dr. (LTC) Vernon Parmley, director of the Cornea Service at Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis, Wash.

Womack Army Medical Center at Fort Bragg, N.C., has been performing free PRK surgery on active-duty soldiers since June 1. The highest priority there goes to special forces soldiers, rangers and soldiers in some frequently deployed units.

Army medical officials say the service plans to offer the procedure at four more centers by mid-2001. Information on Army policy concerning laser vision correction is found at www.armymedicine.army.mil/armymed/default2.htm. — American Forces Press Service

stores and the USO sent a troupe of performers to entertain the soldiers. A mobile "PX in a box" arrived at the Burgdorf Junction fire within two days of the Fort Hood soldiers deploying to Idaho.

In late August, the United Services Organization sent performers to the base camps in Idaho and Montana. — *Army News Service*

Alexandria, Va.

Shinseki Promises Help for Army Youth

REDUCING obstacles to high-school graduation was a major issue discussed at the recent Army Education Summit.

Delegates suggested solutions that ranged from immediate funding for school liaison officers to establishing reciprocal graduation-requirement agreements among schools. Other suggestions included forming a centralized database as a college and career resource, training parents to become informed advocates for their children, and establishing a "no-move" policy for soldiers whose sons and daughters are high-school seniors.

Those attending the summit said all state governments should authorize in-state tuition for military family members attending colleges and universities. They asked that all secondary and primary schools

accept transferred grades and standardized tests, and they asked that the Department of Defense repair and upgrade schools on Army installations.

The Education Summit was held at the direction of GEN Eric K. Shinseki, Army chief of staff. It was hosted by MG Robert L. Van Antwerp Jr., assistant chief of staff for installation management, and organized by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center.

The purpose of the summit was to address youth-education issues, identify solutions, strengthen partnerships among the military and school systems, and to reinforce the Army leadership commitment to education.

To address youth-education issues, 75 delegates from around the Army formed six work groups to evaluate and prioritize 68 issues that surfaced from the installation level. Among the delegates were 49 parents (20 soldiers, 29 spouses), nine school administrators, six youths, six garrison commanders and five school liaison officers.

Shinseki assured the delegates that the Army would take action based on the reports they gave.

"This is about opportunity," he said. "That's what we owe our kids: the opportunity to compete. It's for the youngster who goes to Korea for a tour or to Germany for three years—that they don't come back thinking they've been on Mars. That somehow the coursework they've done, the activities they've participated in, the socialization they've gone through, brings them back in the mainstream."

Shinseki promised more education summits in the future, and said other agencies will no doubt follow the Army's lead.

"This is a transient society," he said. "I will guarantee you there are other agencies that are going to come and ask us about what we started. What we have to do is keep this going. Over time, we will make this effort of educating our children a world-class effort." — **ARNEWS**

Recreation News

Vacationers Save at Retirement Home

IF the prices of hotels in the nation's capital are keeping it off your list of vacation spots, a spot in the heart of the city is worth a look.

The U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home may have a deal for enlisted persons and their families — \$20 per night for up to five nights. And visitors to the sprawling 320-acre facility will live in a historical dwelling — a former convent.

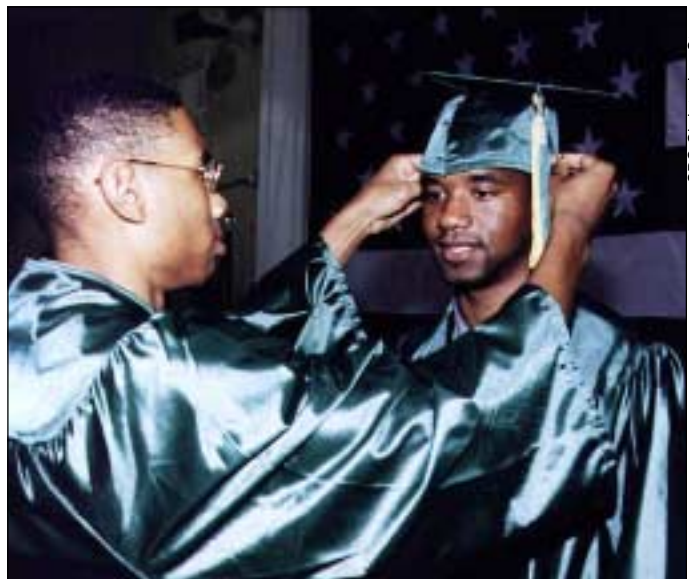
"The convent was built in 1954 for the Sisters of Charity, who used to provide nursing services for residents of the retirement home," said Jean M. Schaefer, the home's public-affairs director. The convent closed in the 1980s.

Schaefer said amenities are sparse in the 37-room building. "You get a bed and a bathroom. It was a convent!" she emphasized. In keeping with economy, though, vacationers can purchase meal tickets to eat at the home's dining facilities — \$3 for breakfast and \$7 each for lunch and dinner.

Vacationers can also use the home's military exchange facilities, which include a lounge and a small store.

The U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home guest house is available for use by enlisted vacationers of all of the armed services, including active-duty members and retirees and their dependents traveling with them, she said. The reservation line is (202) 730-3044.

The retirement home is in the heart of the District of Columbia at 3700 North Capitol St. NW, about 2.5 miles from the U.S. Capitol. Parking is free on the home's grounds and mass transit is available outside the gate. — **AFPS**



SPC Christopher Stape

Students attending schools on Army posts are among those whose needs were discussed at the recent Army Education Summit.

Washington

Pentagon Honors Recruiters of the Year

TWELVE military recruiters were recently honored as Recruiters of the Year.

"The men and women we honor today face the toughest of tasks every day — providing our nation with soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and Coast Guardsmen to protect America's interests and ideals around the world," said Deputy Defense Secretary Rudy de Leon. He noted that armed-forces missions from Kosovo to Korea — and the peace, security and prosperity of the nation — would be impossible without the hard work of America's military recruiters.

De Leon said the military needs quality recruits because of the increasing reliance on sophisticated technologies, and because service members are asked to be warriors, diplomats and engineers. He said recruiting is "one of the most challeng-

ing missions in the armed forces today" and that the mission becomes harder with every drop in unemployment and every rise in wages in America's "red-hot economy."

"But despite the enormity of the challenge of recruiting nearly 30,000 young people every month, America's recruiters have demonstrated that they're up to this job," de Leon said.

This year's Army Recruiters of the Year were SSG Feliece Y. Cortez of the Anderson, Ind., recruiting station; SFC Elizabeth Green of the Los Angeles recruiting station; and National Guard SFC David M. Fulkerson of the Evansville, Ind., recruiting station. — *AFPS*

Washington

New Distance-Learning Program

GETTING a laptop computer and printer into the hands of soldiers wanting to earn technical certification or a college degree just took a step forward.

Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera hosted the Army University Access Online Industry Day in August to generate prospective contractor interest in the recently announced distance-learning initiative to help soldiers complete college "anytime, anyplace, anywhere they can take their laptops."

Potential vendors must provide a technology package that will include a laptop computer, printer, Internet service provider account, maintenance and warranty of equipment, and helpdesk assistance to each soldier who enrolls in distance-learning courses.

"We also want to maximize the number of educational programs available to students, so that they can reap the benefits

of competition, including increased choice, reduced cost and improved program quality," Caldera said.

The resulting program — Army University Access Online — is expected to help soldiers earn college degrees or technical certifications through Internet-based courses while they serve, using laptop computers and vastly expanded learning opportunities.

"The Army's greatest competition in recruiting and retaining soldiers is not the hot economy, but the desire for and availability of higher education to today's young people," Caldera said.

The Army University Access Online contract is slated to be awarded in December to ei-

Career News

Upgrades Planned for Civilian Personnel Online

THE Army Civilian Personnel Online website will soon rename one of its sections and update its features.

Civilian personnel officials are looking to rename their Personnel Management Information and Support System site. The PERMISS site is a decision support system designed to provide "general" civilian personnel management guidance and information. Suggestions to rename the site can be sent through the PERMISS Comments Section or to the webmaster at <http://cpol.army.mil/>.

Upgrades planned for the site include a searchable benefits section, more articles, quality improvements and a new layout. Program manager Pauline Marsh said many of the improvements will come from users' suggestions.

PERMISS is one of two major sections on the CPOL site that answer general civilian personnel questions and provide access to policy documents, said Marsh. The other section is the Civilian Personnel Online Library, a collection of personnel policy statements, regulations and pamphlets.

"These two systems empower the civilian workforce worldwide, curb the number of telephone inquiries and improve the timeliness of response from our Civilian Personnel Advisory Centers," she said.

"Our goal is to increase the daily usage 100 percent each year until at least 95 percent or more of Army's civilian employees, military and civilian managers, are using PERMISS," she said. — *ARNEWS*



SFC Elizabeth Green receives her Recruiter of the Year award from Deputy Defense Secretary Rudy de Leon.

ther a single academic entity or a consortium of education providers. It will then be tested with soldiers based at three currently unnamed Army installations before being offered to all soldiers.

The Army has budgeted nearly \$50 million for AUAO and its website, eARMYU.com, in fiscal year 2001, with another \$550 million over the next five years.

The goal is for the program to be available to all active-duty, National Guard and Reserve members and to provide the resources and command climate that create a true life-long learning community.

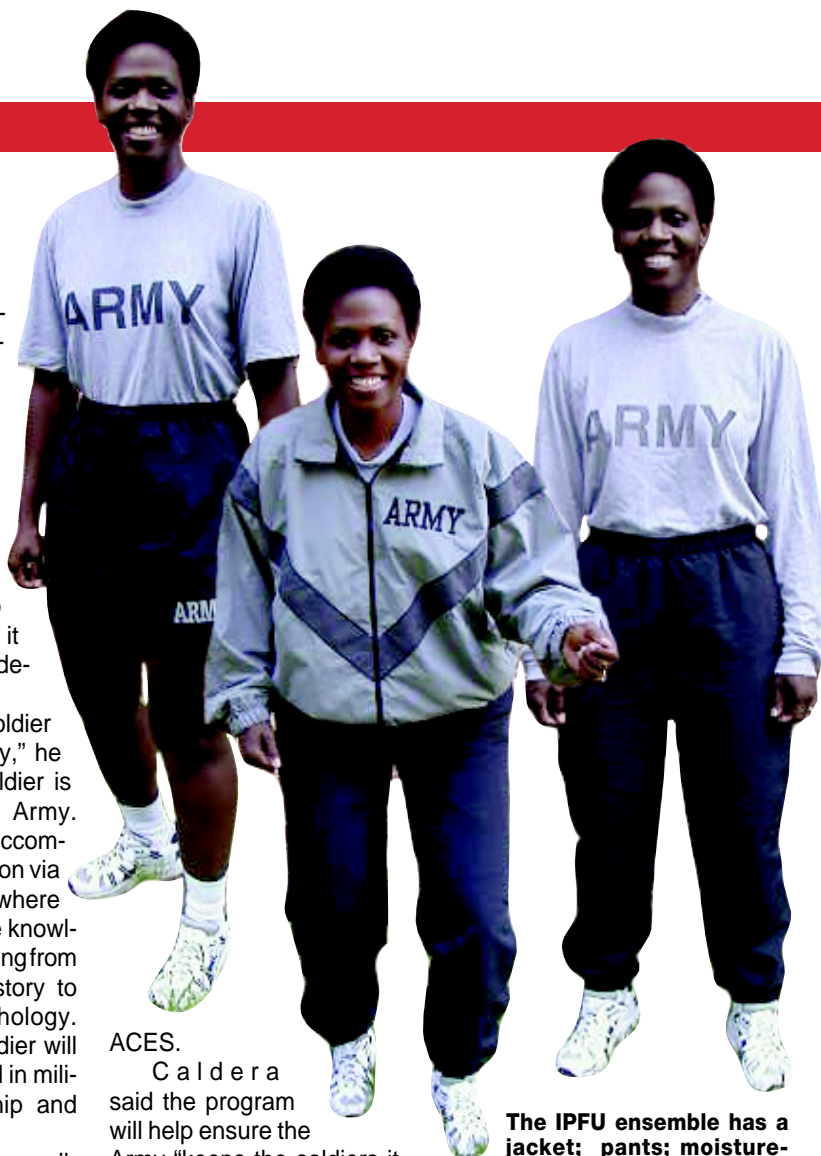
SMA Jack L. Tilley told attendees that it takes soldiers an average of 12 years to get an associate's degree while serving on active duty. The hurdles they face, he said, include non-traditional work hours, field exercises, deployments, strict limits on the number of credit hours one university will transfer from another university, availability of schools and the courses they offer at different Army installations, and a cap on the number of credit hours allowed each

semester under the Tuition Assistance Program.

The Army's top NCO said he believes the new program will help soldiers overcome many of those hurdles and allow them to earn degrees on their first enlistments. He also said he plans on using it to complete his college degree.

"A well-rounded soldier results in a better Army," he said. "An educated soldier is tomorrow's advanced Army. Enabling soldiers to accomplish expanded education via online access from anywhere they are sent will insure knowledge of vast issues ranging from math, science and history to electronics and psychology. This well-educated soldier will be more apt to succeed in military training, leadership and mission."

"Army educational enrollment statistics for last quarter indicate that enrollment in distance-learning programs has doubled since the previous report," said Susan Johnson of



ACES.

Caldera said the program will help ensure the Army "keeps the soldiers it wants and returns great citizens to the community." — ARNEWS

The IPFU ensemble has a jacket; pants; moisture-wicking trunks; and a moisture-wicking, short- or long-sleeved T-shirt.

Washington

New PT Uniform in Stores

THE improved physical fitness uniform became part of a soldier's clothing bag Aug. 15.

Reserve-component soldiers will receive their new uniform as an issue-in-kind beginning next month. Active-duty soldiers can purchase the IPFU in military clothing sales stores.

The IPFU ensemble consists of a gray and black jacket; black pants; black, moisture-wicking trunks; a gray, moisture-wicking, short-sleeved T-shirt; or a gray, moisture-wicking, long-sleeved T-shirt.

Initial-entry soldiers will receive three pairs of trunks; two

long-sleeved T-shirts; three short-sleeved T-shirts; two pairs of gray sweatpants and two gray sweatshirts. The pants and shirts will be issued to IET soldiers only, and will not be available for purchase. These soldiers will receive the IPFU jacket and pants during Phase II of basic combat training.

Soldiers are required to have one jacket; one pair of pants; two pairs of trunks; two short-sleeved T-shirts; and one long-sleeved T-shirt by Oct. 1, 2003. The wearout date for the current PFU is Sept. 30, 2003.

Both uniforms should be authorized for wear in formations until all soldiers acquire the IPFU by the mandatory possession date of Oct. 1, 2003. — HQDA message

Weapons Disposal

Chemical Agent Container Destroyed

THE Army's Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System completed the disposal of 66 VX containers in June, and is looking forward to the disposal of its last VX munitions type, the 13,302 landmines stockpiled on Johnston Island, and the upcoming facility closure.

The VX campaign is the third and final agent campaign left to be completed at JACADS. More than 399,000 munitions and bulk agent have been destroyed at the facility in the past 10 years. This amounts to more than 96.7 percent of the island's stockpile.

JACADS is the country's first fully integrated chemical weapons disposal facility, and the Army has operated it safely since 1990. Closure activities are currently scheduled to begin in January 2001. — ARNEWS